

**Little Hoover Commission Hearing on Child Welfare Services**  
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**August 22, 2002**

The August 1999 Report of the Little Hoover Commission, *Now in Our Hands: Caring for California's Abused and Neglected Children*, contains 14 far reaching recommendations that reflect sound public policy and lay the groundwork for reform of the Child Welfare Services system. The Department of Social Services has used this report as one of our authoritative sources in the development of program goals for the short term as well as in the child welfare redesign being formulated by the Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group.

## **The Current Child Welfare Services Program**

### **Vision of the Children and Family Services Division within the California Department of Social Services:**

The Children and Family Services Division provides leadership and oversight of county and community agencies in the implementation of Child Welfare Services programs through regulations, training, technical assistance, incentives and program evaluations.

### **The Mission is to:**

- ❑ Lead the development, implementation and evaluation of statewide regulations and standards for Child Welfare Services so that public policies are effectively transformed into action by:
  - Continually updating regulations and related material to reflect new public policies and best practice methodologies.
  - Developing and supporting training so that social workers and administrators have knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
  - Providing technical assistance to promote a continuum of services designed to ensure children's well-being, safety and permanence.
  - Creating a user-friendly system, clear procedures and useful tools.
  - Encouraging and supporting community-based services, including prevention, early intervention and treatment programs.
  - Evaluating program results based on the outcomes of our services for children and families.
- ❑ Communicate to ourselves and others the role of the Division in setting, implementing and evaluating Child Welfare Services outcomes.
- ❑ Promote smooth working relationships with all stakeholders of the Child Welfare Services system.

**Major areas of work for 2002 include:**

- ❑ Lead and manage the Child Welfare Services Stakeholder Group project to redesign the Child Welfare Services program.
- ❑ Prepare for and implement the Children and Family Services Review as required by the United States Department of Health and Human Services in 2002; plan for the Social Security Act Title 1V-E reviews to be required by the United States Department of Health and Human Services in 2003.
- ❑ Monitor and work with Counties on corrective action plans when necessary to ensure Counties' compliance with Social Security Act Title IV – B and Division 31 Regulations as implemented by Child Welfare Services and Probation agencies. Support Agency in the implementation of AB 636 to change to an outcome-based accountability system.
- ❑ Monitor and take corrective action when necessary to ensure Counties' compliance with Title IV-E and Division 45 Regulations in both Child Welfare Services and Probation agencies.
- ❑ Complete and begin implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System.
- ❑ Increase the outreach capacity of the Ombudsman program.
- ❑ Implement audit standards required by the United States Department of Health and Human Services for Group Homes and Foster Family Agencies.

**Child Welfare Services Redesign Initiative**

There are several major features in the proposed redesigned Child Welfare Services system. They include:

**Strong Prevention Focus for Child Welfare Services**

- ◆ Rationale: One recent study estimated the costs associated with child abuse and neglect to be \$94 billion in the United States. However economic costs are only one factor, it is impossible to overstate the tragic consequences endured by the children themselves. Community programs are not always integrated or coordinated in an effective way to support children and families served by the Child Welfare Services program.
- ◆ Redesign Proposal: County Child Welfare Services agencies will have leadership role in integrating, organizing and coordinating community support and services for families.
- ◆ Impact: Creating and sustaining an integrated prevention system for families served by Child Welfare Services and the greater community will expand the support for all families, and provide greater access, availability and quality of

services. In addition, once services are provided earlier there will be enormous potential for cost savings associated with the \$94 billion nationally identified above.

### **Differential Response to Families Referred to Child Welfare Services**

- ◆ Rationale: Currently the response to reports to Child Welfare Services result in an adversarial or criminal approach to investigation and substantiation of child abuse or neglect. In addition 92% of the families reported receive little or no support or services, and over 40% of these families are re-reported to Child Welfare Services within two years.
- ◆ Redesign Proposal: To create a differential response approach for families referred to Child Welfare Services. This more customized response would provide a less adversarial approach to working with families by utilizing a “non-allegation, fact finding process”. It would create a shared responsibility for child safety with local partner agencies (such as health and law enforcement) and community based organizations. This partnership would provide for an integrated “team” response to families.
- ◆ Impact: Families would receive an assessment within five days rather than the current outside limit of ten days. The new partnerships would enable the 92% of families who case is “closed at intake,” as identified above, to be assessed for safety and offered services where appropriate. Families would be engaged and offered services in a voluntary manner when possible.

### **Safety for Children is the first priority of Child Welfare Services**

- ◆ Rationale: Currently it is up to each individual county to determine what child abuse reports will receive a response, what the timeframe of the response will be and what the response will involve. There is no statewide, standardized approach to decision-making related to assessment, investigations and substantiation of child abuse reports.
- ◆ Redesign Proposal: Development and implementation of a statewide standardized approach to child safety – requiring counties to use the same set of criteria that will guide decisions about needs and interventions with families in which maltreatment occurs and safety is a concern.
- ◆ Impact: A well-developed safety assessment for children and families will result in a consistent and effective process to determine their safety and needs. Many counties are currently providing a quality response and an effective systematic assessment process, but this is not a statewide requirement. A standardized curriculum will be necessary so that counties provide consistent safety responses for all children.

### **New Evidence Based Cycle to Ensure Quality Practice**

- ◆ Rationale: We should consider the effectiveness and harms of different interventions before implementing them, using reliable estimates of benefit

and harm. Social work currently is regarded as “authority based,” and studies show that the core social work literature contains little rigorous research from either a quantitative or qualitative point of view.

- ◆ Redesign Proposal: Establish a “cycle of evidence-based practice” in which practice interventions and services that are used with families are tested against pre-set criteria and continually evaluated for effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes for children and families. Also establish a clearinghouse where information regarding effective practice methodologies and tools can be readily available.
- ◆ Impact: Children and families receive services that address their unique needs effectively resulting in improved child welfare outcomes related to safety, permanence and well-being.

### **Permanency for Every Child**

- ◆ Rationale: Today too many children are not provided the level of attention needed to place them a permanent home in a timely manner. Multiple placements have been linked to mental health problems and other negative outcomes. A lack of emotional security has prevented many youth from transitioning successfully to adulthood.
- ◆ Redesign Proposal: Create an immediate focus for all children on “permanency.” Priority is given to reunification with the child’s family, when that is not possible alternative permanency must be promoted through adoption and guardianship, preferably with kin or a foster parent with whom the child has bonded. In the redesign “permanency” is defined as both “legal permanency and emotional security”. Other strategies have been developed to help youth transition to adulthood when efforts to locate a permanent home have not been successful.
- ◆ Impact: More children will have a permanent home sooner and be afforded the emotional security requisite for a sense of well being.

### **Human Resources Are Key To Achieving Outcomes**

- ◆ Rationale: A decreasing number of people are interested in the child welfare profession. The complexities of the job, high staff turnover, lack of organizational support for quality supervision, inadequate incentives to attract and keep social workers and difficulty in securing adequate resources for clients are among the reasons cited for the staffing shortage.
- ◆ Redesign Proposal: A key foundational assumption of the Stakeholders Group is that relationships are the core technology of social work and key to creating changes necessary for the achievement of the child welfare program goals. The significant factors associated with child welfare workforce development are recruitment, retention and caseload/workload,

and efforts must be geared to all three of these areas in order to build and sustain the capacity to serve children and families.

- ◆ Impact: Increased number of qualified and well-trained social workers available to Child Welfare Services and community partners. Success of the redesign requires a workforce ready to meet the demands of providing support and services to children and families.

### **Redesigning Funding**

- ◆ Rationale: Current funding formulas may have perverse incentives that are not supporting the outcomes required of the redesign. For example, the current system is designed to fund placing children into foster care – not for keeping them out.
- ◆ Redesign Proposal: Multiple funding strategies that change our focus from placement to keeping children safe in their birth family home if possible. Proposals include the development of a funding methodology that ties financial incentives to achieving desired outcomes; and a reinvestment strategy of state dollars achieved from foster savings achieved by redesign.
- ◆ Impact: Multiple funding strategies will be required to implement the redesign system, including reinvestment of savings from reducing foster care to prevention and early intervention services.

### **Accountability for Outcomes**

- ◆ Rationale: Current monitoring of performance focuses on compliance with prescribed processes, not the outcomes that result from these processes.
- ◆ Redesign Proposal: Incorporate the requirements of AB 636 (2001) into the redesigned child welfare system. These requirements are based on federal outcome measures used in the Child and Family Services Reviews currently being conducted in all states. Further, performance indicators have been developed that will help social workers, program managers and policy-makers determine if services are successful at the individual, family, community and state levels.
- ◆ Impact: We will know how effective Child Welfare Services are for the children and families served and be in a position to make improvements based on previous results.

### **Next steps**

- ◆ Continue policy development and refinement.
- ◆ Develop the plan for implementing the redesign.
- ◆ Expand partnership base to develop operational strategies of the redesign, including youth, foster and kin parents, county child welfare administrators, labor organizations and the judiciary.
- ◆ Design pilots to test redesign features.

The Department appreciates the Commission's interest in the Child Welfare Services program and welcomes the continued involvement through participation in the Child Welfare Services Redesign effort in ways that can promote our mutual goals on behalf of abused and neglected children and their families.